

ZARDARI CHANGES PRIME MINISTER CANDIDATES AFTER WARRANT ISSUED; VIRAL VIDEO MOCKS POWERFUL IN PAKISTAN

In a week that has seen rapid changes in Pakistan's civilian government, it appears that President Asif Ali Zardari's political party, the PPP, has had to change its choice to replace Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani, who was ousted earlier in the week by the Supreme Court.

Yesterday, the PPP announced Makhdoom Shahabuddin as their choice for Prime Minister:

President Asif Ali Zardari nominated Shahabuddin to form a new cabinet after the Supreme Court dismissed Gilani for contempt on Tuesday.

A consensus choice and a loyalist, Shahabuddin was briefly finance minister during the 1993-1996 premiership of Benazir Bhutto, Zardari's wife who was assassinated in 2007.

His nomination was announced after more than 24 hours of crisis talks and intense horse trading between Zardari and members of his fractious ruling coalition.

In brief remarks at the national assembly, Shahabuddin showcased his loyalty by thanking Zardari and extending greetings to members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on the birthday of his late wife.

"I am thankful from the bottom of my heart (to Zardari)," he told reporters.

“Today is a special day because it is Benazir Bhutto’s birthday and I send my congratulations on this birthday to all party workers,” he added.

That plan appears already to have come to a complete halt, as an arrest warrant was issued today for Shahbuddin:

A non-bailable arrest warrant was issued against Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) leader Makhdoom Shahabuddin in the ephedrine quota case, DawnNews reported.

President Zardari had nominated Shahabuddin as a candidate for the new prime minister. He had also filed his nomination papers for the slot on Thursday.

The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) issued warrants against Shahabuddin, Musa Gilani and one other person.

Earlier on June 7, Regional Director of the ANF Brig Fahim Ahmed Khan had told the Supreme Court that the ANF had widened its inquiry against Shahabuddin who he said had ordered the local conversion of ephedrine after Berlex Lab International and Danas Pharma (Pvt) Ltd failed to export asthma drugs to Afghanistan.

The ephedrine scam had come to light in April when the ANF informed a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry, that the ephedrine quota worth Rs7 billion was given to two Multan-based companies on the pressure of an influential person.

Yes, the Gilani mentioned above is the son of the former Prime Minister. From Reuters:

In an unexpected twist to Pakistan’s latest political saga, an anti-narcotics

court issued an arrest warrant for Shahabuddin in connection with a case of violated quota limits for the export of ephedrine while he was health minister.

That case allegedly involved Gilani's son, Ali Musa Gilani, who is accused by anti-narcotics investigators of violating the quotas. Gilani and Shahabuddin have denied any wrongdoing.

Geo TV is reporting that the PPP is now moving to another candidate as their first choice for the Prime Minister election to be held in Parliament tomorrow afternoon:

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has decided that Raja Pervaiz Ashraf will be the party's leading candidate for prime minister.

This decision was made after the PPP dropped the name of Makhdoom Shahabuddin as its leading candidate.

According to Geo News senior anchor Kamran Khan, the name of Makhdoom Shahabuddin was dropped due to his involvement in the Ephedrine scandal case. Earlier an anti-narcotics court had issued non-bailable arrest warrants for Makhdoom Shahabuddin and Ali Musa Gilani.

It is expected that Raja Pervaiz Ashraf will be introduced as the PPP's candidate for prime minister to coalition partners later today (Thursday) and a power sharing formula will be discussed.

It seems significant to me that at a time when such huge changes in the political leadership of the country are being driven by scandal, a YouTube video that has gone viral in the country features a comedian poking fun at power. The Express Tribune interviewed Ali Gul Pir about

his his video, "Waderai Ka Beta":

When asked what inspired him to write this song, the young comedian candidly says, "I didn't put any thought into it. I was not even expecting it to go viral. I just woke up one day and the deadly combination of power failure and boredom made me write it."

The video shows Pir singing in front of a Hummer next to armed bodyguards. He raps about the luxurious brands he wears and the attention he gets because of his money and power, and also refers to how the social status of those around him changes because they are his pals. "The track is a dig at influential people who misuse their authority," says Pir. "The subject could be anyone from the sons of bureaucrats to tribal leaders."

Here is the video. If the english version of the lyrics does not appear, click on the "CC" button. I especially love the expressions on the faces of the "cute girls" in the nightclub scene:

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ruEqKftUs>[/youtube]